

Press Roundtable

**Richard Holbrooke**

Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan

**Berlin, Germany**

**February 23, 2010**

**DEPUTY PRESS ATTACHÉ MITCHELL MOSS:** Good morning everyone. We're very pleased and proud to have Ambassador Richard Holbrooke with us today, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Ambassador Holbrooke is arriving with his delegation from an extensive trip in the region, which he will discuss. This will be on the record, I would just request that, when you ask questions, please identify yourself and your news organization. Ambassador Holbrooke.

**AMBASSADOR HOLBROOKE:** Thank you very much, Mitchell. It's great to be back in Berlin, where I've spent so many wonderful times. This is the end of a ten-nation – could have been eleven nations if the Turkmen government could have gotten it's act together and given us the flight clearance before we were on the runway (laughter). We'd asked for it two weeks before and we got it as we were taking off for Astana. Ten nations in ten days, nine days, and the first two . . . I went to the Gulf first and then to Afghanistan, Pakistan, then to four of the five Central Asian republics, and yesterday to Georgia, and then here in Berlin to consult with the German government – and those consultations, we're right in the middle of them. I'll go back to the Chancellor's Office in a couple of hours.

First of all, Afghanistan. I think that it's fair to say that the situation in Afghanistan is better today than it has been in the last year, which is not to say that it is satisfactory yet. We have a long way to go, but 2009 was a challenging year -- a productive but challenging year for the international community in Afghanistan. From the day President Obama took office to November 19 of last year, exactly ten months of his first year in office, the Afghan elections overshadowed everything else in the country and, at the same time, the President had to make some historically-important decisions on troop commitments. He has said publicly that these were the most difficult decisions he made in his first year as president. When he became president we had 31,000 troops in the country, by the fall of this year we'll have over 100,000; the international troop contributors came through with significant increases of their own, including Germany, and so the result has been a tremendous increase in our commitment during a period of considerable political challenge. On the civilian side, we had only 300 American civilians in Afghanistan a year ago today; we now have about 940 and it's continuing to grow. That may not sound like a lot to you compared to 100,000 American troops, but for each international worker, American official, there are about nine support people – local, third country, NGO – so it's a lot of people, and Germany has also increased its activities and, in particular, its very important police training programs.

So 2009 was a year when strategy was revised, resources were committed, and we worked our way through this very difficult messy but necessary election. 2010 is going to be the year in which we implement our strategy, and in that regard we are going to put very heavy attention on the, first of all on General McCrystal's military strategy, which has been very well covered, but also the civilian efforts which have gotten far less attention. For example, in the military campaign now going on in Helmand and in Marjah, there has been a very substantial civilian component, but it's been virtually unreported. We have senior civilians

standing by to go in behind the troops in fields from public administration to agriculture, to rule of law, and of course our heavy emphasis on training the police and the army. So this is going to be a major effort which is well underway without much public attention. On the political side, we had the successful London conference, which was a proposal of Prime Minister Brown and Chancellor Merkel, and we're looking forward to a conference in Kabul later in the spring. On the political side also, we are looking for more international cohesion, and that was the purpose of my trip.

I want to now mention briefly the trip with particular attention to where I was yesterday in Georgia. The Georgians have committed a battalion of troops, with no national caveats, which is just finishing its training. President Saakashvili had asked me to come and review the troops, which I did yesterday. I'm told by the U.S. training advisory personnel that they are very good troops, many of them have served in Iraq. They will be deployed probably in late March, they will go into Helmand, so they going to go right into the battle, and we're very pleased with that. On a per capita basis, Georgia will have the largest contribution of any country in the world until the U.S. hits about 100,000. And if you do the math and we had 100,000 I think we slightly edge ahead of them. But we're very grateful to the Georgians for what they are doing, especially at this time, and we went to Georgia to express my appreciation on behalf of the United States and to discuss further plans and relationships. My trip to Georgia had nothing to do with the well-known issues between Georgia and Russia, but simply about Afghanistan. So I want to stress that, that issue.

And with that I'll stop and take your questions.